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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 6 November 2007, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Mohamad ..... (Sudan)

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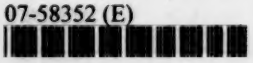

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 29: Assistance in mine action (A/62/307; A/C.4/62/L.6)

1. **Mr. Harland** (Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)), introducing the item, recalled that the United Nations Mine Action Service was responsible for coordinating the activities of the United Nations Mine Action Team. The year 2007 marked the tenth anniversary of the 1997 Ottawa Convention on the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and the creation of the Mine Action Service. He noted that 155 States had ratified or acceded to the Convention and that most other States nevertheless largely respected its principles.

2. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report (A/62/307), the coordinated approach to mine action adopted by the United Nations system and its partners in the field and at Headquarters had led to a number of achievements. Over the past 10 years some 40 million stockpiled anti-personnel mines had been destroyed and their production, sale and transfer had almost stopped. Casualty levels had declined, vast areas of suspect lands had been deemed mine free and national capacity to manage mine-action programmes had been increased. Mine action had been linked to development and reconstruction planning, and progress had been made in advancing gender equality and the rights of persons with disabilities across the mine-action sector. Much remained to be done, however, and he therefore welcomed the recommendations on a forward-looking mine-action agenda contained in the report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action (A/62/307).

3. Turning to the United Nations Inter-Agency Mine Action Strategy for 2006-2010 (ibid., chap. III), he noted with regard to Strategic Objective 1 (Reduction of death and injury by at least 50 per cent) that marking and fencing and mine clearance and education reduced death and injury. Mine-risk education increasingly targeted the most at-risk populations and better data made it easier to identify and manage the relatively small percentage of land areas that posed the highest risk. The number of countries reporting casualties and also the number of casualties had declined substantially since 2003. In addition to mine-action activities, affected States could take other measures, such as Cambodia's efforts to curtail the scrap-metal trade to significantly reduce casualty rates.

4. As for Strategic Objective 2 (Mitigation of the risk to community livelihoods and expansion of freedom of movement for at least 80 per cent of the most seriously affected communities), he said that, in cooperation with Governments and partners, only areas that showed evidence of contamination were targeted for clearing based on a prioritization system that reflected their impact on the surrounding community. As a result, clearance efforts had been concentrated where most needed and extensive areas of land had been returned to productive use. In Angola, for example, surveying activities had reduced the estimated percentage of mine-affected land from about 20 to 30 per cent to less than 1 per cent. A total of 6.3 million square metres of land had been released back to communities and 82 communities had been declared free of mines.

5. Referring to Strategic Objective 3 (Integration of mine-action needs into national development and reconstruction plans and budgets in at least 15 countries), he said that 13 countries had in fact integrated mine action into their national development plans and budgets. Mine action was a sound investment with appreciable development returns in such areas as health, education and livelihoods. Integration of mine action into development budgets ensured funding, including increased funding from Governments themselves, which enhanced national ownership and institutional support.

6. Lastly, with regard to Strategic Objective 4 (Assistance for the development of national institutions to manage the landmine/explosive-remnants-of-war threat, and preparation for residual capacity in at least 15 countries), he said that in accordance with the guidelines set out in Mine Action and Effective Coordination: The United Nations Inter-Agency Policy (ibid., para. 3), many countries had gradually assumed full responsibility for clearance activities. A number of programmes would be transferred to full national management over the next few years. Direct technical support was no longer required in such mine-affected countries as Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Yemen, although financial support and access to methodological and technological developments might still be required. Their programmes were effectively independent and capable of sharing lessons learned with other less

developed national programmes. Countries such as Mauritania and Senegal were well on their way towards developing national programmes with United Nations support.

7. He welcomed draft resolution A/C.4/62/L.6 on assistance in mine action, which demonstrated the Committee's support for mine action while clearly acknowledging the primary responsibility of States, and strengthened the international commitment to mainstream mine action into development planning and to promote efficiency in mine-clearance activities. He also welcomed the support provided in the draft resolution for efforts to advance gender equality in mine action and its recognition of the contribution mine action made to post-conflict confidence-building. The Mine Action Guidelines for Ceasefire and Peace Agreements (ibid., para. 24) had for example been distributed to peacemakers engaged in discussions with the parties to the conflict in Nepal and the peace agreement of December 2006 contained provisions related to mine action.

8. The United Nations Mine Action Team was continuously evaluating its efforts and working with partners to identify lessons learned. The expertise and commitment of stakeholders and the support of Member States and other entities would help the Team create a world free of the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war, where the needs of victims were met and they were integrated into their societies, and where individuals and communities lived in a safe environment conducive to development.

9. **Mr. Costa Pereira** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the European Union, asked what could be done to increase the Organization's rapid-response capability and what measures were being undertaken to reduce the alarmingly high number of child casualties.

10. **The Chairman** requested more information on the legal framework governing mine action, for example whether that framework consisted of mainly peacekeeping and humanitarian-related endeavours, as well as whether such a legal framework was desirable and necessary.

11. **Mr. Harland** (Department of Peacekeeping Operations) replied that the legal framework for mine action consisted mainly of a loose "architecture" of, for example, Security Council resolutions dealing with post-conflict situations and the mandates for various United Nations activities. The central question was whether the existing system could ensure coherent and effective action. The proof that it was effective was that large areas of land were being cleared and the casualty rate was dropping rapidly. Although the legal framework could no doubt be improved, the progress made could be attributed to well-coordinated international action.

12. Turning to the questions from the representative of Portugal, he said that the key to rapid response, other than timely allocation of resources, was preparation. The Organization already had a good rapid-response capability; the Department organized an annual exercise in Sweden in cooperation with the Swedish authorities, NGOs and Member States to simulate complex situations, improve procedures and strengthen ties among participants. With regard to resources, he cited the very different situations in 2006 in South Lebanon and in Guinea-Bissau. In Guinea-Bissau, a relatively minor and low-profile situation, resources had had to be "cobbled together" from the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), a process which had taken time and delayed response. In the more high-profile situation in South Lebanon, voluntary contributions had been made available swiftly and contractors had been on the ground within two weeks of the end of hostilities.

13. He said that preventive and educational measures and warnings played an important role in avoiding child casualties. Concrete steps had been taken to assist all members of mine-affected communities, including children under 18. In compliance with the International Mine Action Standards, mine education was made context-specific, taking into account the needs of affected communities. Sex and age-disaggregated data on victims was analysed to improve planning, risk-reduction and education activities. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention collected data on victims so that mine-action practitioners could better target risk-reduction activities. The Organization had many child-oriented activities: UNICEF country officers for example, in cooperation with Governments in more than 20 countries, worked to help reduce the number of child casualties. He stressed that mine clearance played an important role in reducing the number of child victims. In that context, he supported the Secretary-General's call (ibid., para. 60 (d)) for the adoption by

the end of 2008 of an effective legally binding instrument on cluster munitions.

14. **Mr. Kodera** (Japan) said that his delegation's policy on mine action was based on the principles of peacebuilding, human security and strengthened cooperation among Governments, NGOs, the private sector and academia. Since announcing its policy on mine action in 2004, his Government had allocated an average of $3.8 million a year to mine-action activities, rising to $4 million in 2006.

15. In the area of peacebuilding, his Government provided assistance to improve security and safety in post-conflict countries. For example, it had provided funds to train personnel of the Iraqi National Mine Action Authority in information-management systems. With regard to human security, he recalled that the Trust Fund for Human Security had been established at his delegation's initiative and said that his Government contributed to projects that empowered individuals faced with such threats as mines and small arms. In the Sudan, for example, it had helped fund mine-risk education and victim-assistance activities. In the area of cooperation, especially with regard to mine-detection and mine-clearance equipment to be used in Afghanistan, Croatia and Cambodia, the Government encouraged exchanges of information with a view to meeting the needs of the recipient countries.

16. Japan pledged its continuing support for the Zero Victims Programme. To that end it would make contributions for grass-roots human-security projects and would also share its expertise in the development of mine-detection and mine-clearance equipment.

17. **Ms. Al-Haideri** (Iraq) said that, despite United Nations mine action, some 15,000 to 20,000 people around the world, mostly women, children and the elderly, were killed or maimed every year by landmines and unexploded ordnance.

18. In 2003, Iraq had established a national mine-action authority responsible for the removal of all landmines and the explosive remnants of three decades of war. Iraq had also acceded to the Ottawa Convention.

19. **Mr. Perazza** (Uruguay), speaking on behalf of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), said that, in view of the perverse and indiscriminate nature of anti-personnel landmines, MERCOSUR and associated countries were committed to fulfilling their obligations under the Ottawa Convention. In that context, they had participated in a number of regional mine-action initiatives, including the Programme of Integral Action against Anti-personnel Mines in Central America of the Organization of American States. MERCOSUR also welcomed the establishment of the Regional Support Centre for Humanitarian Demining in Santiago, Chile, whose main task was to support operation planning through an information-management system for mine action.

20. Notwithstanding recent progress in mine action, much work remained to be done and States parties to the Convention faced many impediments, including climatic factors, topography and lack of resources, which had prevented them from destroying all anti-personnel mines within the prescribed 10-year period. It was important that States parties should finalize the application process for extensions during their meeting to be held in Amman later in November 2007.

21. Since the granting of extensions would entail additional implementation costs, donor States should stand ready to fulfil their commitments, and civil society and relevant international organizations should continue to play their essential roles. In that connection, Chile, in cooperation with Norway, had organized a seminar in Santiago in August 2007 on the implementation of the Convention.

22. All Latin American countries affected by the scourge of mines, along with representatives of relevant international organizations and civil society, had participated in that seminar. In addition to renewing their moral and political commitment to the principles of the Convention, the participants had identified factors that impeded implementation, and had underscored the importance of extensions as a means of achieving full compliance with its requirements.

23. One of the greatest challenges was caring for the victims of mines. Member States should ensure that their health and educations systems, social services and legal frameworks adequately addressed the victims' needs. In that connection, MERCOSUR welcomed the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Its early entry into force would contribute significantly to improving the quality of life of mine victims.

24. The donor community also had an important role to play in strengthening the State structures of

countries plagued by mines. In that regard, donors should be mindful of and abide by their obligations while taking into account the needs of victims and ensuring that progress could be objectively measured.

25. Mine action, in addition to being a legal obligation for States parties to the Ottawa Convention, was an ethical and moral imperative for all Member States.

26. **Ms. Hernández Toledano** (Cuba) said that while her country welcomed international efforts to address the harm inflicted by mines on civilian populations, it remained concerned by the inefficiency of mine clearing in post-conflict situations.

27. Recalling her country's policy to use anti-personnel mines exclusively for defence, she said the Cuban authorities had implemented strict regulations in respect of the use of such mines. Furthermore, at no time had Cuba ever exported mines. The defensive use of mines stemmed from the Cuban people's will to defend its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity from armed aggression.

28. Cuba had made numerous practical contributions to international efforts to address the harm caused by the indiscriminate use of mines. Hundreds of its doctors were currently treating persons injured by mines in various parts of Africa, Asia and Central America.

29. More emphasis should be placed on international cooperation and the timely mobilization of resources both for demining activities and for assistance to mine victims. States that had planted mines in other States' territories were legally and politically obliged to assist in demining and in helping the victims. The United Nations, for its part, should continue to help mine-affected States develop their national capacities for demining and victim rehabilitation as part of its comprehensive development strategy.

30. Although reaching an agreement on a draft resolution had been made difficult by the insistence of certain delegations on language that distorted its purpose, the resolution nonetheless was designed to address the humanitarian aspects without detriment to the legitimate interests of States in matters of disarmament and national security. She stressed that preserving a balance between the humanitarian and national-security dimensions of mine usage had thus far allowed the Committee to reach a consensus on the draft and that any breach of that balance would lead to the breakdown of the consensus.

31. In the future, she hoped that the draft resolution would focus strictly on the humanitarian dimensions and on mine assistance; it was for such bodies as the First Committee to review other aspects of mine action.

32. **Mr. Sangchai** (Thailand) said that, as a country affected by mines, Thailand had mainstreamed mine action into national policies. The National Committee on Humanitarian Mine Action, chaired by the Prime Minister, acted as the focal point of all relevant national agencies and coordinated key mine-action activities, including demining, mine-risk education, victim assistance, assessment of mine-action results and cooperation with partners. In addition, the Thailand Mine Action Center had been established in 1999 to strengthen mine-clearance capacities, provide mine-risk education and promote coordination and cooperation among agencies, civil society and NGOs. The Government had increased the number of participants in risk-education programmes and had systematically provided assistance to mine victims.

33. Under the direction of the Thailand Mine Action Center and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, joint demining actions had been carried out with the support of partner countries such as Japan, the United States and China. As a result, many mine-affected areas, especially along the Thai borders, had been converted into agricultural, trading and tourism zones. His country reiterated its pledge to continue with efforts to implement the Ottawa Convention. The Government had approved a substantial financial package to support mine action. Thus, the Thailand Mine Action Center would be able to intensify demining activities in the most affected areas, raise public awareness, establish safety lanes, erect fences and promote further cooperation for the rehabilitation of mine victims. To that end, two five-year plans had been established at the national level: the Master Plan for Mine Victim Assistance and the Master Plan on Mine Risk Education.

34. **Ms. Song** Danhui (China) said that her Government supported efforts to address the concerns of mine-affected countries, and was dedicated to cooperation in demining.

35. China believed that the Amended Protocol II to the 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons struck the proper balance between humanitarian concerns and

the legitimate military needs of States. In addressing the humanitarian concerns, it was of vital importance to enhance the universality of that Protocol and preserve its authoritativeness. Since acceding to that Protocol, China had strictly abided by its provisions. The Chinese military had carried out technical modifications of obsolete stockpiled anti-personnel landmines to make sure that those in service met the technical requirements of the Protocol. By carrying out two large-scale demining operations in border areas in the 1990s, China had almost eliminated landmine threats on its own territory.

36. China respected the decision of the States parties to the Ottawa Convention to address the humanitarian concerns by means of a comprehensive ban. Although not a State party, China endorsed the objectives of the Convention, and had voted in favour of its implementation in the First Committee.

37. China also attached great importance to international assistance in mine action. Since 1998, the Chinese Government had participated in demining operations in more than 10 countries in Asia and Africa by providing financial donations and demining equipment, dispatching peacekeeping engineering troops and demining experts, and hosting demining-training courses. Chinese peacekeeping engineering troops in Lebanon had received demining certification from the United Nations and were clearing landmines and unexploded ordnance.

38. The Chinese Government pledged its continued participation in demining in Africa, and would provide demining assistance to mine-affected African countries. China was hosting a demining-training course in Nanjing, China, for demining personnel from five mine-affected African countries, and would also donate some demining equipment to those countries.

39. Welcoming the role played in recent years by international mine action in reducing mine threats and promoting development in many countries, she said that China was ready to continue to cooperate closely with all parties to resolve the humanitarian concerns associated with landmines.

40. **Mr. Godinho** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro; and, in addition, Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine, said that during the course of the previous decade remarkable progress had been made towards eliminating anti-personnel mines. However, the European Union was deeply concerned that, every year, thousands of innocent civilians, including children, were claimed by landmines and other explosive remnants of war. It was important to address both old and emerging threats, including reducing the risks posed by cluster munitions.

41. Support for international mine action continued to be among the most important political priorities of the European Union, with financial support totalling approximately 1.5 billion euros since 1997. The European Union was the largest single contributor to both the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross for funds related to mine action. An important goal for the European Union was universalization of the Ottawa Convention, and it welcomed the commitment of States parties to pursue full implementation of that instrument. However, it should be noted that 40 States were not yet party to the Convention and approximately 65 countries were affected by anti-personnel landmines and explosive remnants of war.

42. Clearly, the international community must continue to support mine-action programmes, in both political and financial terms. Despite the importance of mine clearance and stockpile destruction, the European Union believed that emphasis should focus more on victim assistance and mine-risk education. In addition, affected countries should be assisted in fulfilling their obligations under international law, including the Convention. The European Union would continue to focus on national capacity-building with the primary objective of enhancing mine-action-management capacity with affected countries. The European Union supported the integration of mine action into development plans and budgets in order to ensure sustainability of essential initiatives and development of national capacities for the future. The integration of mine action into peacekeeping operations and mandates was also of critical importance.

43. Joint efforts must continue to be pursued by mine-affected countries, donor Governments, regional institutions, NGOs and United Nations bodies. Cooperation and coordination among actors was crucial in order to avoid duplication and to ensure the most effective utilization of resources, building on national capacity where possible. The European Union

remained committed to moving forward with determination in order to eliminate anti-personnel landmines and other explosive remnants of war within the next 10 to 15 years.

44. **Mr. Abdelaziz** (Egypt) said that his country attached great importance to assistance in mine action because mines and explosive remnants of war continued to kill civilians and impeded the exploitation of natural resources. Detecting and clearing the more than 20 million mines spread out over a vast area of Egyptian territory required enormous resources and severely impeded development.

45. The humanitarian aspect was equally serious. Since 1982, there had been more than 8,500 casualties, including at least 700 deaths, in the desert areas of Egypt. On average, more than 50 mine explosions were recorded every year, not to mention the countless number that went unreported. In that connection, the National Human Rights Council, in cooperation with UNDP, had organized an international conference, chaired by former Secretary-General Mr. Boutros-Ghali, on development and mine-clearance from the northwest coast.

46. Among the outcomes of that conference was a call for developed countries and international organizations to provide Egypt with the necessary mine-clearance expertise and technology. The participants had also called for the establishment of a special fund for demining that region, to be financed partly by the States parties to the Second World War.

47. Egypt, despite its full support for the Ottawa Convention, had not been able to accede to that instrument because of the requirement that States parties should clear their territories of mines within a specific period of time. That requirement was impossible to meet, owing to his country's limited resources and to the paucity of assistance provided by the States that had planted the mines. There was also a lack of maps showing their exact location or their displacement from their original location over the years.

48. Several years earlier, Egypt had announced a moratorium on the export of mines, and in 1988 had ceased all mine production. It also participated as an observer in all the main meetings of the States parties to the Convention and would continue to do so until it found that acceding to the Convention would be in its national interest.

49. **Ms. Phan Thi Kim Hong** (Viet Nam) said that mines and explosive remnants of war had created significant obstacles to development in a number of countries. Over 15 million tons of bombs and explosive devices had been used in Viet Nam, and the daily life of the people was still threatened by scattered mines and explosive remnants. An estimated 350,000 to 800,000 tons of unexploded ordnance remained scattered in the country.

50. Every year, despite invaluable assistance from over 35 international and non-governmental organizations for mine clearance, mine-risk education and protection to victims, the Government still had to provide a large budget for mine action. Her Government looked forward to continued cooperation and assistance from international and non-governmental organizations with a view to completing the task of clearing the mines and unexploded ordnance.

51. **Mr. Riofrío** (Ecuador) said that his country and Peru had begun a unique joint mine-clearance operation on their border following the signing of the peace agreement in 1998. In June 2007, the Presidents of the two countries had reiterated their commitment to continue to develop joint technical and financial assistance. In addition, with the support of the Governments of Canada, Norway, the United States, Japan and Italy, the European Union and other regional bodies, an area of Ecuadorian territory had been cleared of mines; however, it represented less than half the area affected.

52. As permitted under the Ottawa Convention, Ecuador kept only 1,000 mines for training purposes. With the support of the Organization of American States, Ecuador had provided medical care and rehabilitation to mine victims. The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities would also provide support to a number of mine victims. He stressed, however, that mine action undertaken by the developing countries would be successful only with the continued support of the international community.

53. **Mr. Bahadur** (Nepal) said that the proliferation of landmines had affected agricultural economies, shattered socio-economic development and torn the fabric of societies. Continued exposure to mines displaced populations, fuelling further conflict and intensifying hunger and poverty.

54. As a country emerging from a decade of armed conflict, Nepal was intensely aware of the effects of mines and other explosives. Though Nepal had yet to accede to the Ottawa Convention, it supported international commitments to control the production, transfer and deployment of excessively injurious weapons, including mines.

55. Mine clearance was an aspect of the comprehensive peace agreement between the Government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in 2006. The United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) had supported the Government in that action, and was sharing information on safe storage and mine clearance. The Government was also working with UNMIN to improve national capacity in mine clearance, and had decided to set up a mine action authority, with a view to freeing Nepal from the scourge of mines.

56. There was a need for enhanced technical assistance in modern mine-action technology. He commended the initiative of NGOs in their advocacy of risk education and for creating an international climate conducive to banning mines. Nepal pledged to work with the United Nations system in reducing the impact of landmines on populations and people's livelihoods.

57. **Mr. Khammanichanh** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that, although tremendous efforts had been undertaken to remove mines and unexploded ordnance, much remained to be done, especially in the area of victim assistance. With more than 80 countries contaminated by explosive remnants of war, there were hundreds of new victims every day. To build a safer environment and to meet survivors' needs, every effort should be made to enhance international assistance.

58. As the most heavily bombed country per capita in the world, nowhere were the lasting impacts of unexploded ordnance more evident than in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Nearly 3 million tons of bombs had been dropped on its territory during the Indochina conflict. Up to 30 per cent of that ordnance, including millions of cluster bomblets, had failed to detonate, leaving as many as 78 million unexploded bomblets littering the landscape. Of the 17 provinces in Laos, 15 remained contaminated, with hundreds of new victims each year, more than 40 per cent of whom were children. That scourge was also hampering the development of the country, and had constrained its capacity to live up to its international commitments, including poverty eradication and sustainable development.

59. A trust fund had been established in 1995 and the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme had been launched in 1996 with the support of UNDP, UNICEF and donor countries. It had accomplished much to date. However, the challenge was to clear more contaminated land for agricultural production and other socio-economic activities, as well as to assist survivors and their families and reduce the number of civilian casualties. The Government had also set up a national regulatory authority to plan, oversee and coordinate all mine action in the country.

60. Expressing gratitude to all donor countries and organizations for their generous support, he earnestly hoped that greater aid would be forthcoming. Experience had shown, however, that mine clearance alone was insufficient. Priority should also be given to assisting victims in affected areas, international cooperation and preventing the proliferation of those weapons.

61. **Mr. Majok** (Sudan) said that his delegation appreciated the support given by the United Nations, donor countries and other stakeholders involved in mine action in the Sudan, and urged them to support capacity-building in order to strengthen national mine-action programmes.

62. The Sudan continued to support the General Assembly's declaration of 4 April as International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, and was firmly committed to its objectives. The Sudan, as a State party to the Ottawa Convention, was developing a mine-action legislative framework, an institutional framework and operational capacities. Mine-action authorities had been established under the Government of National Unity and the Government of Southern Sudan respectively. Mine action had been included in the national budget. Humanitarian demining training and mine-clearance activities were under way in coordination with the United Nations, and a landmine-impact survey was being carried out. Concurrently, the Government of National Unity was destroying many stockpiled anti-personnel mines, although some would be retained for training purposes.

63. Victim-assistance programmes in the Sudan had been integrated into the overall issue of disability. Existing laws covered all kinds of disabilities, providing transportation, education, health care and

employment. A large rehabilitation centre had been established for war victims, including victims of mines and explosive remnants of war.

64. The Sudan's mine-action programme faced many challenges, including limited funds, logistical and administrative problems entailed by the size of the country, poor coordination among mine-action stakeholders, lack of information on the location and extent of mine-affected areas, and poor national capacity.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.